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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8923  
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3540  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9753  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4156  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0048  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0014  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0032  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3763  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2039  
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0708  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0894  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0036  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1682  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2187  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 002131

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: ACTIVISTS ATTEND HUMAN RIGHTS DAY ROUNDTABLE; DO  
NOT SUPPORT SANCTIONS

REF: A. TASHKENT 451  
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 2084  
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 2083  
[1](#)D. TASHKENT 2112

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In commemoration of Human Rights Day on December 10, the Embassy held a roundtable for prominent Uzbek human rights activists at the Embassy and an evening reception with diplomatic, government, and human rights contacts at the Ambassador's residence (septel). Issues discussed at the roundtable included the Government's recent amnesty resolution, torture, and religious extremism. In marked contrast to previous human rights events hosted by the Embassy, there were few reports of authorities preventing human rights activists from attending either event. At the roundtable, human rights activists assessed that enhanced dialogue with the Government, rather than the implementation of sanctions, would be the most effective way to advance human rights in Uzbekistan. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In the afternoon of December 10, the Embassy hosted a Human Rights Day roundtable chaired by the Ambassador and the DCM and attended by four prominent human rights activists: Ferghana-based Rapid Reaction Group (RRG) member Abdusalom Ergashev, Tashkent-based Human Rights Alliance (HRA) member Elena Uralayeva, Jizzakh-based Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) member Bakhtiyor Hamroev, and Tashkent-based Independent Initiative Group of Human Rights Activist (IIGHRA) Deputy Chairman Ulugbek Usmanov.

NO REPORTS THAT ACTIVISTS PREVENTED FROM ATTENDING...

[1](#)3. (C) The Embassy also had invited two additional activists to the roundtable, but Mothers Against the Death Penalty and Torture Chairperson Tamara Chikunova was ill and Ezgulik

leader Vasila Inoyatova was delayed in court, where she is defending several individuals accused of religious extremism.

None of the attendees reported being pressured by authorities not to attend the event. This contrasted favorably, they noted, with the GOU's use of threats, house arrest, and beatings in March to prevent several human rights activists from attending the Embassy's reception to launch the 2006 Human Rights Report (ref A).

...BUT HAMROEV FOLLOWED TO EVENT

14. (C) Hamroev reported being followed by two cars on his way from Jizzakh to Tashkent, but he experienced no direct harassment. His home has reportedly been under 24-hour surveillance since his son Ikhtiyor, currently imprisoned on politically-motivated charges of hooliganism, allegedly stabbed himself with scissors after being beaten by prison guards on November 30 (ref B).

AMBASSADOR'S OPENING REMARKS

15. (C) The Ambassador began the roundtable by noting the great personal risks human rights activists around the world take in reporting abuses and advocating for positive change. He emphasized that the United States would continue to support human rights activists who work to safeguard human dignity and overcome oppression and injustice. The Ambassador also lamented some recent negative developments, including the conviction of Ezgulik activist Karim Bozorboev on politically-motivated charges (ref C), the continued mistreatment of Hamroev's son, and the recent deaths of three

inmates in Andijon (ref B). The Ambassador stressed the importance of engaging the Uzbek Government on human rights issues and taking advantage of the current opening in relations to seek cooperation on tangible progress in this area.

ACTIVISTS DISCUSS RECENT EFFORTS

16. (C) After the Ambassador's opening remarks, each of the participants elaborated on their recent activities. Ergashev described the RRG's presentation of its alternative report to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) in Geneva in early November, where its recommendations were reportedly well-received. He also talked of his organization's recent efforts on child labor and migrant rights. Uralayeva explained how the HRA has frequently organized protests criticizing the elections and calling for the release of political prisoners. In contrast to previous attempts this year, Uralayeva noted that the Government did not intervene when HRA held a picket in front of the General Prosecutor's Office on December 8. Usmanov described the IIGHRA's monitoring of trials of alleged religious extremism, noting that his organization has monitored more than 80 such trials in the past five years.

ATTENDEES DOUBTFUL POLITICAL PRISONERS WILL BE AMNESTIED

17. (C) The activists also discussed with the Ambassador the Government's recent adoption of its annual amnesty resolution. State-controlled media reported that the resolution would apply to women, foreigners, juveniles, and those over 60 years of age. The activists were doubtful that political prisoners would be released, noting that prison officials frequently contrive for political prisoners to be charged with infractions of prison regulations to make them ineligible for amnesty. Hamroev said that he was personally against the annual amnesty because he believed that only ordinary criminals were released each year. For his part, the Ambassador noted that the release of any political prisoners would be a strong signal that the Government was serious about engaging on human rights, and we would stress this point with GOU officials. In the past few weeks, each

of the major human rights groups, including Ezgulik and HRSU, has issued press releases calling for the amnesty of many prominent political prisoners. The Ambassador noted we would also be pressing for a decree against torture, return of international human rights NGOs, and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to prisons (something the participants expressed vigorous approval for.)

#### ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSES TORTURE

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18. (C) Usmanov told the group that most reported incidents of torture occurred during pre-trial detention as law enforcement officials attempt to elicit confessions from defendants. He also described how his own son was tortured into confessing an alleged crime and was later sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Both Uralayeva and Ergashev believed that the Government already had adequate legislation to protect against torture, but the laws were not being implemented. Ergashev also blamed low levels of education among law enforcement officials for their abusive behavior, noting that many officers purchase their diplomas.

#### DIFFERENT VIEWS EXPRESSED ON RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

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19. (C) The roundtable also touched upon religious extremism in Uzbekistan. Hamroev flatly denied that religious extremism existed in Uzbekistan, arguing that any evidence of extremism was fabricated by the Government. Ergashev, in contrast, admitted that extremism existed, but argued that the Government created it by clamping down too hard on religious moderates over the years. He said that he had investigated more than 1,000 cases in the Ferghana Valley of youth tried for religious extremism. In the majority of cases, he found that the defendants had attended only one or two Koranic study sessions with Hizb ut-Tahrir members and were not actual members of the group. Ergashev previously expressed his view to poloff that many innocent individuals sentenced for extremism later joined banned groups after being imprisoned with actual extremists.

#### HAMROEV'S CRITICISM PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR AMBASSADOR TO EXPLAIN U.S. POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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110. (C) Hamroev was more critical of U.S. human rights policy than the other activists, accusing the U.S. government of placing "geopolitical" concerns ahead of human rights in Uzbekistan. (Comment: We believe that Hamroev was the source of a press release by HRSU leader Talib Yukobov, later picked up in an article on Eurasianet.org, criticizing poloff by name for neglecting to meet with human rights activists during a one-day visit to Jizzakh province in October. After the roundtable, poloff reemphasized to Hamroev his open-door policy and offered to facilitate the travel of human rights activists from the regions to Tashkent when necessary. End comment.) The Ambassador politely disagreed with Hamroev, denying that geopolitical considerations trumped human rights concerns and emphasizing that the United States was using the mutual desire for better relations to seek concrete steps from the Government on human rights. The Ambassador the potential value of continued dialogue with the Government on human rights, noting a televised speech given by President Karimov on December 7 expressing Uzbekistan's desire to maintain mutually beneficial relations with the West as a sign that the Government was potentially warming up to further dialogue on human rights.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS DON'T SUPPORT SANCTIONS

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112. (C) When the Ambassador raised the possibility of the U.S. Congress implementing sanctions against Uzbekistan for its human rights record and refusing to allow an independent investigation of the 2005 Andijon events, the roundtable participants agreed that implementing sanctions against

Uzbekistan would not be the best way to advance human rights at the present time. Instead, they believed that enhanced dialogue with the Government would in fact offer the best hope for stopping torture and improving human rights. Even Hamroev, who at first raised the idea of South African-style sanctions, ultimately concluded that Uzbekistan was not apartheid South Africa and that a cut-off in dialogue with the U.S. would only rebound badly on human rights activists. Hamroev acknowledged the sad reality that Karimov would be overwhelmingly re-elected and agreed with others that the best hope for progress lay in trying to foster concrete progress through intensified dialogue with the GOU.

COMMENT

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¶13. (C) Perhaps in an attempt to alleviate international criticism of the December 23 presidential election, the government appears to be applying less pressure than usual on human rights activists in recent weeks. In addition to

allowing several prominent activists to attend the Human Rights Day roundtable, the government allowed the Human Rights Alliance to hold a public protest in front of the General Prosecutor's Office and a press conference on the election (ref D). A greater number of government officials than usual also attended an evening reception in honor of Human Rights Day (septel). Furthermore, it is clear from the roundtable that many human rights activists do not support the implementation of sanctions by the U.S. government on Uzbekistan at this time, but instead see greater value in using renewed dialogue with the Government to press for tangible progress.

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